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INDIANAPOLIS MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO CHILD PORNOGRAPHY CHARGES

WASHINGTON – Michael Barnhorst, 42, of Indianapolis, pleaded guilty to three counts of receiving child pornography, Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney Susan W. Brooks of the Southern District of Indiana announced today.

In pleading guilty before Chief U.S. District Judge Larry J. McKinney at the U.S. District Court in the Southern District of Indiana, Barnhorst admitted that he possessed images with photos of children engaged in various sexual acts. Barnhorst had been previously convicted on two counts of child molestation in 1994.

The case arose from “Operation Emissary,” a U.S. Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) investigation, which targeted individuals purchasing child pornography from a website that advertised and sold access to images depicting the sexual abuse of children. Barnhorst purchased access to the website and was intercepted downloading three illegal images. A search warrant was executed at his residence, and Barnhorst ultimately confessed to accessing child pornography websites and downloading images of the sexual abuse of children. A forensic examination of the hard drive seized from Barnhorst’s residence revealed numerous images of child pornography, including those downloaded from the intercepted website.

As part of his plea agreement, Barnhorst faces between 15 and 120 years in prison and lifetime supervised release. Sentencing has been scheduled for Nov. 16, 2007 at 11:30 a.m.

In February 2006, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. Led by the United States Attorneys Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state, and local resources to better locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit <http://www.projectsafechildhood.gov>.

The case is being prosecuted jointly by Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven DeBrotta for the Southern District of Indiana and Trial Attorney LisaMarie Freitas of the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS) of the Criminal Division. The case was investigated by ICE, and a forensic examination of the computer evidence was conducted by Computer Forensic Specialist Shannon Perkins of the High Tech Investigative Unit of CEOS.

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